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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S WORK IN THE UNITED STATES

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THE history of women's work in the United States is the story of an economic and industrial readjustment which is by no means yet complete. Women have worked since the world began, and at the dawn of history their labor was probably as important in family or tribal economy as it is today in the industrial world. Since early colonial days in this country, moreover, women have worked for gain, sometimes selling to the local storekeeper the products of leisure hours spent in spinning, weaving, knitting or sewing, sometimes themselves keeping little shops, and sometimes hiring themselves out to work in the families of their neighbors. But during the nineteenth century a great transformation occurred which has materially changed woman's economic position.

Woman's work may be divided into five general categories: unpaid labor, independent gainful labor, domestic service, wage labor in manufacturing industries and wage labor in trade and transportation. In all these varieties of work great changes have taken place. In the first place technical improvements have removed from the home to the factory and workshop a large part of the labor formerly carried on almost exclusively by women. Women naturally followed their occupations, and in doing so changed their economic status from that of unpaid laborers to that of paid laborers. Though the number gainfully employed has materially increased, however, the amount of unremunerated home work performed by women must still be considerably larger than the amount of gainful labor, for in 1900 only about one fifth of all females 16 years of age and over were breadwinners.¹

¹ In 1870, the earliest year for which statistics are available, 14.7%, and in 1900 20.6% of the female population 16 years of age and over were bread-winners.

Not only have unpaid, home-working women been transformed into paid factory operatives, but both independent home workers and wage-earning home workers have been transferred to factories and workshops. This change is especially evident in the comparatively backward clothing industries, which the sewing machine and artificial power have gradually driven from the home to the shop and, in some branches, to the factory. In the early days of wholesale clothing manufacture in this country all the work, except the cutting, was done for piece wages in the homes of the workers. Gradually, however, the industry has been drawn into sweatshops and factories. Independent domestic production, meanwhile, except in certain lines like dress-making and to a slight extent the preserving of fruit and making of jelly, has practically become a thing of the past. The movement away from home work can hardly be regretted, however, in view of the fact that the entire history of women's work shows that their wage labor under the domestic system has almost invariably been under worse conditions of hours, wages and general sanitation than their wage labor under the factory system.

There has probably been, moreover, a material increase in the proportion of women wage earners as compared with independent producers. Before the introduction of machinery wage labor generally meant domestic service. There were, of course, exceptions. Early instances are well known of women spinners gathered together in groups and paid fixed sums, and women were early employed to sort and cut rags in paper mills. But the range of wage-earning occupations open to them has enormously increased, while it is doubtful whether any larger proportion are now engaged in independent industry than were so engaged two centuries ago. In commercial and professional pursuits, it is true, the opportunities for independent business have very greatly increased, but in manufacturing industries, as a result of the unprecedented growth of wholesale production, they have materially narrowed for women as well as for men.

The wage-earning opportunities of women in the three great groups of occupations, domestic service, manufacturing industries, and trade and transportation, have also changed decidedly. Thousands, of course, have always been employed in domestic

service, which has acted as the complement of the industrial pursuits. The opportunity to "hire out" has continually confronted the working woman and frequently, when she complained that her conditions of work were hard and her pay inadequate, she has been admonished by philanthropists and even by economists to betake herself to the kitchen, whose homelike conditions, high wages and pressing need of her labor have always been loudly proclaimed. The conditions and problems of domestic service, indeed, have changed far less than those of any other occupation. Nevertheless, the proportion of all gainfully employed women engaged in domestic and personal service has steadily decreased.¹

In the manufacturing industries, on the other hand, great changes have taken place. The entrance of women into these industries may be attributed to three principal causes, machinery, artificial power and division of labor. All of these are in part the cause and in part the effect of an unprecedented development of wholesale, as opposed to retail production, and this growth of wholesale trade is itself primarily the result of improved means of communication and transportation.

These three factors have also caused a considerable amount of shifting of occupations. Under the domestic system of labor woman's work and man's work were clearly defined, women doing the spinning, part of the weaving, the knitting, the sewing and generally the cooking. But with the introduction of machinery for spinning and weaving thousands of hand workers were thrown out of employment. It is not surprising to learn that the first spinners and weavers by machinery were women. Later, however, mule spindles, operated by men, were introduced for part of the work. In certain other cases, too, machinery has caused the substitution of men for women in industries formerly considered as belonging to woman's sphere. Women's suits, for instance, are now largely made by men tailors, and men dressmakers and milliners are not uncommon. Men bake our bread and brew our ale and wash our clothes in

¹ In 1870, 58.1% and in 1900 only 39.4% of all females 10 years of age and over engaged in gainful occupations were in the division "domestic and personal service."

the steam laundry. At present men even clean our houses by the vacuum process.

One result has been that thousands of women who, under the old régime, would have sat calmly like Priscilla by the window spinning, have been forced to seek other occupations. When the industrial revolution transformed the textile industries they naturally turned to the only other employment for which they were trained, sewing. This, however, only increased the pressure of competition in the sewing trades, already sufficiently supplied with laborers. In the middle of the century, moreover, before any effective readjustment had taken place, the sewing machine was introduced, greatly increasing productivity and at the same time further sharpening competition.

Thus the increased productivity due to machinery and the simultaneous loss, by reason of the greater adaptability of men to certain machines, of woman's practical monopoly of the textile trades has caused intense competition and has forced many women into other industries, not traditionally theirs. From the beginning, however, their choice of occupations has been hampered by custom. As early as 1829 a writer in the *Boston Courier*¹ said :

Custom and long habit have closed the doors of very many employments against the industry and perseverance of woman. She has been taught to deem so many occupations masculine, and made only for men, that, excluded by a mistaken deference to the world's opinion, from innumerable labors, most happily adapted to her physical constitution, the competition for the few places left open to her, has occasioned a reduction in the estimated value of her labor, until it has fallen below the minimum, and is no longer adequate to present comfortable subsistence, much less to the necessary provision against age and infirmity, or the every day contingencies of mortality.

Economic necessity, however, with division of labor as its chief tool, sometimes aided by power machinery and sometimes alone, has gradually opened up new industries to women. As early as 1832 they were employed in as many as one hundred different occupations. In many of these, to be sure, they were

¹ *Boston Courier*, July 13, 1829.

as rare as women blacksmiths are today. But in 1836 a committee of the National Trades' Union, appointed to inquire into the evils of "female labor," reported that in the New England States "printing, saddling, brush making, tailoring, whip making and many other trades are in a certain measure governed by females," and added that of the fifty-eight societies composing the Trades' Union of Philadelphia, twenty four were "seriously affected by female labor."¹ The census of 1850 enumerated nearly one hundred and seventy-five different manufacturing industries in which women were employed, and the number has steadily increased until there is now scarcely an industry in which they are not to be found.

Usually, however, they have been employed, in the first instance, only in the least skilled and most poorly paid occupations, and have not competed directly with men. This has been due in part to custom and prejudice, perhaps, but primarily it has been due to lack of training and ambition, and to general irresponsibility. One of the causes, to be sure, of the lack of training and ambition is the knowledge that well-paid positions are seldom given to women. A much more vital cause, however, is to be found in the lack of connection between the work and the girl's natural ambitions. Before the industrial revolution women were probably as skilful and efficient in their lines of industry as men in theirs. The occupations taught girls at that time were theirs for life and naturally they took great pride and pleasure in becoming proficient in work which prepared them for marriage and for the career which nearly every young girl, with wholesome instincts, looks forward to as her ideal, the keeping of the home and the care of children. But when the connection was lost between work and marriage, when girls were forced by machinery and division of labor to undertake tasks which had no vital interest to them, there grew up a hybrid class of women workers in whose lives there is contradiction and internal if not external discord. Their work no longer fits in with their ideals and has lost its charm.

¹ From the proceedings of the National Trades' Union, published in the *National Laborer*, Nov. 12, 1836, and reprinted in the *Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, vol. vi, pp. 285-6.

Even in industries which, like the textile and sewing trades, belong to women by long inheritance, machinery and division of labor have so transformed processes that both the individuality of their work and the original incentive to industry have been wholly lost in a standardized product. Moreover, in their traditional sphere of employment and especially in the sewing trade, competition has been so keen that the conditions under which they have worked have been, upon the whole, more degrading and more hopeless than in any other class of occupations. From the very beginning of the wholesale clothing manufacture in this country, indeed, five elements, home work, the sweating system, the contract and sub-contract systems increasing the number of middlemen between producer and consumer, the exaggerated overstrain due to piece payment, and the fact that the clothing trades have served as the general dumping ground of the unskilled, inefficient and casual women workers, have produced a condition of almost pure industrial anarchy.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the greatest economic success of women wage earners in manufacturing industries has been attained in occupations in which they have competed directly with men. Women printers and cigarmakers, who in many cases have been introduced as the result of strikes, have generally earned higher wages than their sisters who have made shirts and artificial flowers. Usually, however, when, as in certain classes of cigar making, they have entirely displaced men, they have soon lost their economic advantage. And it is exceedingly doubtful whether, in such cases, women have gained as much as men have lost. Certainly they have not regained what they themselves have lost through being displaced by men in their customary sphere of employment.

The occupations grouped under the title "trade and transportation," most of which are new and offer, therefore, no problems of displacement, have furnished working women, in general, their most remunerative employments. This, too, is the group of industries in which, within recent years, the most rapid increase in the number and proportion of women workers has

taken place.¹ Though the number of saleswomen, stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers, telegraph and telephone operators, and so forth, is still small as compared with the number of women textile factory operatives, seamstresses, boot and shoemakers, paper box makers, and so on, it is rapidly increasing. In this movement, moreover, there is evident more than anywhere else a certain hopeful tendency for working women to push up from the level of purely mechanical pursuits to the level of semi-intellectual labor. The trade and transportation industries are, roughly speaking, middle-class employments, as contrasted with the manufacturing industries, which are, roughly speaking, working-class employments.

Women's wages have always been excessively low and their hours excessively long. About 1830 Mathew Carey estimated that in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Baltimore there were between 18,000 and 20,000 working women, at least 12,000 of whom could not earn, by constant employment for 16 hours out of the 24, more than \$1.25 per week. At this rate he figured that, allowing for the loss of one day a week through sickness, unemployment or the care of children, and counting lodging at 50 cents and fuel at 12½ cents a week, a woman would have left for food and clothing just \$22.50 per year. A good seamstress without children and employed all the time he figured could earn \$1.12½ per week or \$58.50 per year, out of which she would have to pay 50 cents per week for rent, 15 cents per week for fuel, 8 cents per week for soap, candles, etc., and \$10 for shoes and clothing—which would leave her for food and drink 2¾ cents per day. If she was hampered by the care of children, was unemployed one day a week, or was slow or unskilled, he figured that, at the same rates of expenditure, she would have a yearly deficit of \$11.56.² The situation of the

¹ In 1870 nearly 20% of all females 10 years of age and over engaged in gainful occupations were in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits and only 1% in trade and transportation, but in 1900, while the proportion of women in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits had increased to 24.7%, the proportion in trade and transportation had increased to 9.4%.

² Carey, *Miscellaneous Pamphlets*, Phila., 1831, "To the Ladies who have undertaken to establish a House of Industry in New York," and "To the Editor of the New York *Daily Sentinel*," *Select Excerpta* (A collection of newspaper clippings

working women in the cities of this country during the early decades of the nineteenth century was, indeed, as characterized by the New York *Daily Sentinel*, the first daily labor paper in this country, "frightful, nay disgraceful to our country, . . . a gangrenous spot on the body politic, a national wound that ought to be visited and dressed, lest it rankle and irritate the whole system."¹

Fifteen years later conditions were little better. An investigation of "female labor" in New York in 1845 led to the assertion by the *New York Tribune* that there were in that city about 50,000 working women, onehalf of whom earned wages averaging less than \$2 per week, and to the further statement that the girls who flocked to that city from every part of the country to work as shoe binders, type rubbers, artificial-flower makers, match-box makers, straw braiders, etc., found competition so keen that they were obliged "to snatch at the privilege of working on any terms." "They find," said the *Tribune*, "that by working from fifteen to eighteen hours a day they cannot possibly earn more than from one to three dollars a week, and this, deducting the time they are out of employment every year, will barely serve to furnish them the scantiest and poorest food, which, from its monotony and its unhealthy quality, induces disgust, loathing and disease. They have thus absolutely nothing left for clothes, recreation, sickness, books or intellectual improvement."²

In 1863 the average wages paid to women in New York, taking all the trades together, were said to have been about \$2 a week, and the hours ranged from eleven to sixteen a day.³ And in 1887 it was stated that in New York City nine thousand and in Chicago over five thousand women earned less than \$3 per week.⁴

Some of these statements may be exaggerations, but there

made by Matthew Carey, now in the Ridgway Branch of the Library Company, Philadelphia), vol. 13, pp. 138-142; *Appeal to the Wealthy of the Land*, 3d ed., p. 15.

¹ Quoted in Carey, *Miscellaneous Pamphlets*, No. 12, Philadelphia, 1831.

² *New York Daily Tribune*, July 9, August 19, 1845.

³ *Fincher's Trades' Review*, Nov. 21, 1863.

⁴ *Industrial Leader*, July 9, 1887.

can be no doubt that, throughout the entire history of women in industry in this country, their wages, in thousands of cases, have been inadequate for decent support. Their wages, too, have been far below those of men. In 1833¹ and again in 1868² it was stated that women's wages were, on an average, only about one fourth what men received. Moreover, it has been authoritatively stated that during the civil war period the wages of women increased less than those of men, while their cost of living rose out of all proportion.³

It is probable that, in general, women's wages have been less flexible, more subject to the influence of custom and less to the influence of demand and supply, than men's. Unfortunately custom in this case has furnished a standard of exploitation and not of protection. It is probable, too, that working women have suffered more than working men from periods of panic and depression, for such periods, like war, have thrown upon their own resources thousands of women who in normal times are supported by their male relatives.

In the textile industries wages, during the first half of the nineteenth century at least, were higher than in the clothing trades. The Lowell girls during the so-called "golden era" earned from \$1.50 to \$2 per week in addition to their board of \$1.25. Their day's work, however, varied from 11 hours and 24 minutes in December and January to 13 hours and 31 minutes in April, and averaged 12 hours and 13 minutes, or 73½ hours per week.⁴ It must be remembered, moreover, that there were in this country, during these early years, two distinct systems of factory labor, the factory boarding-house system of Lowell, Dover, N. H., and other places in that neighborhood, and the family system which prevailed in Fall River, throughout Rhode Island, and generally in New York, New Jersey and Maryland. In the factories operated on the family system of labor wages were distinctly lower than in those of the Lowell

¹ *Workingman's Shield*, Cincinnati, Jan. 12, 1833.

² *Workingman's Advocate*, Chicago, June 6, 1868.

³ Mitchell, *History of the Greenbacks*, p. 307.

⁴ Montgomery, *Practical Detail of the Cotton Manufacture of the United States*, 1840, pp. 173-174.

type, and were frequently paid in store orders. In these factories, too, hours were longer, being in summer $13\frac{3}{4}$ per day and averaging throughout the year $75\frac{1}{2}$ per week.¹ Girls, moreover, went to work at an earlier age. Child laborers whom the Lowell manufacturers could not afford to keep in their factory boarding houses were employed in large numbers.

The general conditions under which women have toiled in this country have been little if any better than their wages and their hours. During the years when Lowell is supposed to have been a busy paradise, with flowers blooming in the factory windows, poetry and hymns pasted on the walls, and the *Lowell Offering* furnishing an outlet for the exuberant literary activities of the operatives, the ventilation, both of factories and of boarding houses, was absolutely inadequate. In the boarding houses from four to six and sometimes even eight girls slept in one room about 14 by 16 ft., and from twelve to sixteen girls in a hot, ill-ventilated attic. In winter the factories were lighted by lamps. One woman who testified before the Massachusetts Committee on Hours of Labor in 1845 stated that, in the room where she worked, along with about 130 other women, 11 men and 12 children, there were 293 small lamps and 61 large lamps which were sometimes lighted in the morning as well as in the evening.² The lack of ventilation in the mills and boarding houses of Lowell was in 1849 made the subject of a report to the American Medical Association by Dr. Josiah Curtis, and in the same year the physician of the Lowell Hospital, established by the manufacturing corporations exclusively for the use of operatives, attributed to lack of ventilation in the cotton mills the fact that, since the founding of the hospital nine years before, over half the patients had suffered from typhoid fever.

Typhoid fever, however, was doubtless a far less general result of these conditions than consumption. Even the *Lowell Offering*, which found no evils in factory labor except long hours and excused these on the ground that long hours were universal throughout New England, bears evidence in practically every

¹ Montgomery, *op. cit.*

² *Massachusetts House Document*, no. 50, 1845, p. 3.

number that tuberculosis of the lungs was the great scourge of the factories. The labor papers, moreover, as early as 1836, began to point out the direct connection between factory labor and consumption. In 1845, too the *United States Journal* published a poem by Andrew McDonald, the first verse of which reads: ¹

Go look at Lowell's pomp and gold
 Wrung from the orphan and the old;
 See pale consumption's death-glazed eye—
 The hectic cheek, and know not why.
 Yes, these combine to make thy wealth
 "Lord of the Loom," and glittering pelf.

There is no reason to believe that conditions were any better, if as good, in other manufacturing districts. In the clothing industry, moreover, which has long been concentrated in cities, overcrowding and unsanitary housing conditions in horrible variety have furnished the environment of working women. Whole blocks of tenements, too, have been rented out to families in New York for the manufacture of cigars. As early as 1877 the United Cigar Manufacturers' Association, an organization of small employers, condemned as unsanitary these tenement cigar factories where the babies rolled on the floor in waste tobacco, and the housework, the cooking, the cleaning of children and the trade of cigar making were all carried on in one room.²

From these evil conditions, low wages, long hours and unwholesome sanitary arrangements, immigrant women have naturally been the greatest sufferers, for, like their husbands and brothers, they have been obliged to begin at the bottom. Irish women first entered the factories of New England, for example, as waste pickers and scrub women. But their daughters became spinners and weavers. There have been, however, certain exceptions to this rule. The skilled Bohemian women cigar makers who came to New York in the seventies, for instance, earned from the first comparatively high wages. Foreign girls

¹ Quoted in the *Voice of Industry*, a labor paper published in Lowell, Nov. 28, 1845.

² *New York Sun*, Dec. 3, 1877.

who have gone into domestic service, moreover, have frequently earned higher wages than American girls who have chosen to be, for example, saleswomen.

The chief forces which have tended to improve the condition of working women have been trade unions, industrial education and legislation. In certain industries, especially shoe making, cigar making, printing and collar and cuff making, trade unions have brought about higher wages, shorter hours or better conditions in certain localities. Women shoe-binders, about one thousand in number, won a strike for higher wages at Lynn as early as 1834,¹ and during the sixties and seventies the Daughters of St. Crispin protected the working women of their craft. Women members were admitted into the Cigar Makers' International Union in 1867 and were prominent in the great strike of 1877. The International Typographical Union admitted women in 1869. Probably no organization of women workers, however, has been more effective than the Collar Laundry Union of Troy, N. Y., the predecessor of the Shirt, Waist and Laundry Workers' International Union. During the sixties the Collar Laundry Union is said to have raised the wages of its members from \$2 or \$3 to \$14 a week, and to have contributed \$1000 in aid of Troy iron molders on strike against a reduction of wages, and \$500 in aid of striking bricklayers in New York.²

The tailoresses of New York, moreover, were organized as early as 1825, and in 1831 sixteen hundred tailoresses and seamstresses of that city went on strike for an elaborate wage scale covering a large variety of work, and remained out for four or five weeks.³ Considering that the population of New York in 1830 was under 200,000, this strike bears comparison with the great shirt-waist workers' strike of 1909-1910. Two years later the journeyman tailors of Baltimore were assisting the tailoresses of that city in a "stand-out" for higher wages,⁴

¹ *Lynn Record*, Jan. 1, 8, March 12, 1834.

² *The American Workman*, Boston, Aug. 7, 1869; *Workingman's Advocate*, Chicago, April 28, 1866; *The Revolution*, N. Y., Oct. 8, 1868.

³ *Carey's Select Excerpta*, Vol. 4, pp. 11-12.

⁴ *Baltimore Republican*, Oct. 2, 1833.

and in the summer of 1844 the Boston tailors aided a large and apparently successful strike of sewing women.¹ In 1851 an effort to assist some six thousand shirt sewers in New York led to the foundation of a shirt sewers' coöperative union, which prospered for several years.² Many other organizations of sewing women have been formed and have conducted strikes, which have sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed.

In the textile industries, too, a long series of efforts by operatives to improve their own situation began with the picturesque strike of four hundred women and girls in Dover, N. H., in 1828, when the operatives paraded the town with flags and inscriptions and the factory agent advertised for two or three hundred "better-behaved women."³ The long and bitterly contested but successful strike of the Fall River weavers against a reduction of wages in 1875 was led by women who went out after the Weavers' Union, composed of men, had voted to accept the reduction.⁴

Many other examples of effective trade-union activity among women workers might be cited. These women's organizations, moreover, have proved powerful factors in the fight for ten-hour laws.

The industrial schools and business colleges which began to spring up in the sixties and seventies have also furnished important aid to working women. Apprenticeship for girls has always been a farce. Even in colonial days girl apprentices were rarely taught a trade of any kind, and early in the nineteenth century apprenticeship for girls, as well as for boys, came to be generally a means of securing cheap child labor. After the industrial revolution, indeed, the condition of working women, as regards skill and efficiency, was probably distinctly lower than before they became wage earners. Industrial schools, however, have been very slow of development. Business colleges, on the other hand, began during the eighties to receive

¹ *Peoples' Paper*, Cincinnati, Sept. 22, Oct. 6, 1844.

² *New York Daily Tribune*, July 31, Sept. 11, 1851; June 8, 1853.

³ *Mechanics' Free Press*, Phila., Jan. 17, 1829; *New York American*, Jan. 5, 1829; *National Gazette*, Phila., Jan. 7, 1829.

⁴ Baxter, C. H., *History of the Fall River Strike*, 1875.

large numbers of women students, and have materially aided in opening up in the trade and transportation industries remunerative occupations for women.

Some progress, moreover, has been made through legislation. Laws compelling seats for women employees have helped wherever they have been enforced. Sanitary legislation, too, has effected certain improvements, though it is doubtful whether, on the whole, such legislation has as yet more than balanced the ill results of the greater concentration of population and the greater strain of work.

In a number of states legislation has also brought an answer to the prayer of the "unknown factory girl" of 1846,

God grant, that, in the mills, a day
May be but "Ten Hours" long.¹

But at the same time the speed and intensity of work have been greatly increased. Until about 1836, for example, a girl weaver tended, as a rule, only two looms, and if she wished to be absent for half a day, it was customary for her to ask two of her friends to tend an extra loom apiece so she should not lose her wages. By 1876 one girl tended six and sometimes eight looms. Meanwhile, too, the speed had been increased. In 1873 it was estimated that a girl spinner tended from two to three times as many spindles as she did in 1849.² This tendency to multiply the amount of work to be performed in a given time has continued active. Piece wages have meanwhile fallen so that the total earnings of the operatives have not been increased, but, taking into consideration the cost of living, have rather been decreased.

In the sewing trades, too, the intensity of work has been very greatly increased by the use of the sewing machine, particularly when power-driven, by the resulting minute subdivision of labor, and by the sweating system. A certain amount of division of labor was practised, it is true, long before the invention of the sewing machine. Vest making, for example, was a separate

¹ *Voice of Industry*, Feb. 20, 1846.

² Gray, *Argument on Petition for Ten-Hour Law*, 1873, pp. 21-22.

and distinct business. But it was not until after the introduction of the machine that much progress was made in dividing the work upon a single garment. The sub-contract or sweating system, too, appears to have originated at least as early as 1844,¹ but probably did not assume an important place until introduced about 1863 by contractors for army clothing. At first, moreover, the work for the sub-contractors was nearly all done in the homes. The need, however, for capital to invest in machines and later in power to run the machines, naturally tended to gather the workers into sweat shops, into small establishments, and then into factories where every possible incentive was offered to the most intense concentration of energies and to excessive speed. As in the textile factories, too, piece-rate wages have fallen automatically with productivity so that, whatever the exertion required and the number of garments turned out, remuneration has remained near the subsistence level.

The history of women in industry is, in short, the story of the transfer of women workers from the home to the factory, from labor in harmony with their deepest ambitions to monotonous, nerve-racking work, divided and subdivided until the woman, like the traditional tailor who is called the ninth part of a man, is merely a fraction, and sometimes an almost infinitesimal fragment, of an artisan. It is a story of long hours, overwork, unwholesome conditions of life and labor and miserably low wages. It is a story of the underbidding of men bread winners by women, who have been driven by dire necessity, by a lower standard of living, or by the sense of ultimate dependence upon some man, even if he be only a hypothetical husband, to offer their services upon the bargain counter of the labor market. It is a story of the futile efforts of misdirected charity, whether that of fathers and brothers, of factory boarding houses or of philanthropic organizations, to aid the oppressed working women by offering them partial support, thereby enabling them to accept wages below the subsistence level, and still hold together

¹ In that year it was said that a man and two women working together from twelve to sixteen hours a day earned a dollar among them, and that the women, if they did not belong to the family, received each about \$1.25 a week for their work. *Workingman's Advocate*, July 27, 1844.

soul and body. It is, finally, a story of wasted human lives, some of them wasted in the desperate effort to snatch from the world a little share of joy, and some of them wasted through disease and death or through the loss of the powers of body and mind required for efficient motherhood.

That such has been the history of women in industry is due in part to their lack of training, skill and vital interest in their work. In part it is due to excessive competition in their traditional occupations, combined with a variety of impediments, some of them rooted in established customs and ideals and some of them perhaps inherent in woman herself, to their free movement into new occupations, into the higher paid positions and into less congested communities. In part, however, it is due to the lack of appreciation of the need for legislative action.

The four great curses of working women have always been, as they are today, insufficient wages, intense and often unfair competition, overstrain due to long hours, heavy work or unhygienic conditions, and the lack of diversified skill, or of any opportunity or incentive to acquire and display ability and wisely-directed energy. The story of woman's wage labor is, therefore, pitifully sad and in many respects discouraging. But it is the story of an industrial readjustment which is not yet near completion, and there is good reason to believe that the turning point has been reached and that better things are in store for the working woman. When we realize, however, what the economic position of women has been in the past and through how many generations large numbers of them have toiled under conditions which involved not only terrible suffering to themselves, but shocking waste to the community, it becomes evident that the present problem will not solve itself, but demands of our generation the best thought, the best energy, and the most thorough legislative regulation designed to conserve the human resources bound up in the mothers of the nation.